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Before the  
**FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION**  
Washington, D.C. 20054

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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
OFFICE OF SECRETARY

In the Matter of )  
 )  
Telephone Number Portability ) CC Docket No. 95-116  
 ) DA 96-358

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**FURTHER REPLY COMMENTS OF  
MFS COMMUNICATIONS COMPANY, INC.**

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## SUMMARY

The reply comments submitted by MFS may be summarized as follows:

**Allocating the Costs of Number Portability:** The plain language of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 ("1996 Act") requires that "all telecommunications carriers" should bear the costs of number portability on a competitively neutral basis. This moots the claims that the Commission may exempt carriers from some level of financial responsibility for long-term number portability.

The cost allocation proposals made by some are designed to exempt a class of carriers. Proposals to allocate costs on the basis of number of lines, retail minutes, or number of queries must be rejected, since they serve to place an excessive burden on particular segments of the telecommunications industry, while leaving other segments with little or no responsibility to contribute equitably to number portability. MFS and others conclude that net revenues offer the optimal mechanism for allocating the costs of number portability.

**Recovering the Costs of Number Portability:** While MFS supports fully the Commission's proposals for recovery of common or shared costs, MFS urges the Commission to restrict recovery of direct carrier-specific costs. Permitting carriers to recover their individual costs from other carriers/competitors serves only to subsidize inefficiency, penalize new entrants, and frustrate efforts to allocate number portability costs in a competitively neutral manner.

For this reason, the Commission should prevent carriers from recovering any individual carrier-specific costs, reject arguments to treat carrier-specific costs as

exogenous for price cap purposes, and promulgate additional safeguards to stop carriers from using increased access or interconnection charges as a means of recovering costs.

**The Application of Federal Principles:** MFS agrees with the competitive neutrality principles proposed by the Commission in this proceeding, and urges the Commission to require every state that opts to develop its own database abide by the principles and rules developed in this docket. New entrants should not be forced to litigate number portability issues in every state.



## I. ALLOCATING THE COSTS OF NUMBER PORTABILITY

### A. The Telecommunications Act Makes Clear that “All Telecommunications Carriers” Should Contribute to the Implementation of Long-Term Number Portability

In the initial round of comments, MFS noted that section 251(e)(2) of the 1996 Act is unambiguous in requiring that the costs of number portability “shall be borne by *all* telecommunications carriers on a competitively neutral basis as determined by the Commission.”<sup>2</sup> Other commenters joined MFS in reaching this conclusion.<sup>3</sup> As WinStar noted in its initial comments, section 251 divides the duties placed upon “each telecommunications carrier,” “each local exchange carrier,” and “each incumbent local exchange carrier.”<sup>4</sup> Moreover, as NYNEX highlighted, the Commission itself defined “telecommunications carrier” in the *Report and Order* to include all kinds of providers, other than aggregators, that offer telecommunications transmission services to the public for a fee.<sup>5</sup> Thus, MFS fails to see how section 251 provides the Commission with the authority to exempt categories of carriers from the responsibilities set forth in the section. Congress knew how to provide exemptions when it desired, and indeed it tiered the responsibilities of carriers accordingly.

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<sup>2</sup> 47 U.S.C. § 251(e)(2) (1996) (*emphasis added*).

<sup>3</sup> Comments of SBC Communications, Inc., at 5-6; Comments of Omnipoint, at 3; Comments of Bell Atlantic, at 1; Comments of Public Utilities Commission of Ohio, at 4; Comments of Ameritech, at 1; Comments of WinStar, at 3; Comments of NYNEX, at 5.

<sup>4</sup> Comments of WinStar, at 4. *See also* 47 U.S.C. §§ 251(a), (b), and (c), respectively.

<sup>5</sup> Comments of NYNEX, at 5. *See also Report and Order* at para. 8.

The Commission should not alter this carefully crafted statutory regime by following the suggestions of those few commenters who propose cost allocation schemes that would exempt classes of carriers from providing support for the implementation of number portability.<sup>6</sup> MFS asserts that such arguments contravene the clear statutory language of the 1996 Act, and ignore the fact that all carriers benefit from improvements in the telecommunications marketplace by virtue of long-term number portability. The Commission recognized these market-wide benefits in the *Further NPRM*, stating that “number portability will benefit all telecommunications carriers and users of services through increased competition.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, both the statutory mandate and the unique market-wide benefits offered by number portability dictate that every carrier contribute financially to the implementation of number portability.

**B. The Commission Should Adopt a Net Revenue Cost Allocation Mechanism to Ensure that All Carriers Are Responsible for the Costs of Implementing Number Portability**

In its *Further NPRM*, the Commission proposed that the costs associated with the shared facilities used to provide number portability be allocated “[i]n proportion to each telecommunications carrier’s total gross telecommunications revenues minus charges paid to other carriers.”<sup>8</sup> The Commission declared that this methodology for cost recovery “[b]est comports with [its] principles for competitively neutral cost recovery . . .” *Id.* MFS concurs with the Commission and a number of commenters in concluding that the costs

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<sup>6</sup> See discussion in part I. B., *infra* for these cost allocation proposals.

<sup>7</sup> *Further NPRM* at para. 213.

<sup>8</sup> *Further NPRM* at para. 213.

of implementing long-term number portability should be apportioned in relation to net revenues.<sup>9</sup> Under such an allocation mechanism, the net service revenues of a local telephone carrier would be its total telecommunications service revenues, less its payments for interconnection charges, compensation charges, and charges for unbundled network elements. An interexchange company's share of number portability costs would be calculated on the basis of its revenues, net of the access charges it pays and also any charges it pays for the purchase and resale of long distance services. Allocating the costs of number portability through a carrier's net revenues, minus its carrier payments satisfies the mandate of competitive neutrality because it is borne by *all* carriers, based on their net revenues earned from sales to end user customers. Moreover, such a mechanism is consistent with how the Commission assesses common carrier regulatory fees and funds Telecommunications Relay Services.

MFS asserts that the alternative allocation proposals offered by commenters in fact serve to exempt certain groups of carriers from responsibility for the costs of number portability, and therefore they fail to satisfy the standards of competitive neutrality. Examples of these include allocation mechanisms that are based upon the number of lines maintained by a carrier,<sup>10</sup> the number of queries to the number portability database by a

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<sup>9</sup> Comments of Frontier, at 4; Comments of Teleport Communications Group, at 4; Comments of WinStar, at 5; Comments of Nextel, at 3.

<sup>10</sup> Comments of SBC Communications, Inc., at 7.



carrier's customers,<sup>11</sup> the number of telephone numbers maintained by a carrier,<sup>12</sup> the quantity of "ported" numbers a carrier utilizes,<sup>13</sup> or only that portion of a carrier's revenues that are "related" to the imposition of number portability.<sup>14</sup> MFS argues that each of these proposals subverts the statutory mandate that "all telecommunications carriers" bear some level of responsibility for the implementation of number portability. One proponent of the per-line allocation mechanism admits just as much in its comments: "ILECs currently account for roughly two-thirds of the described [active lines], with interexchange carriers and CMRS providers accounting for the remainder."<sup>15</sup> Basing the allocation upon the number of telephone numbers a carrier has assigned to its customer will achieve the same result, while proposals to base the allocation upon a carrier's interaction with the number portability infrastructure (*e.g.*, per-query charges or the quantity of "ported" numbers used) in fact allow carriers to "free ride" on the market-wide competitive benefits that number portability introduces to the telecommunications industry. MFS therefore urges the Commission to adopt a net revenue cost allocation mechanism, since such a mechanism meets the standards of competitive neutrality and pays regard to the competitive benefits that number portability offers to the telecommunications industry as a whole.

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<sup>11</sup> Comments of Scherers Communications Group, Inc., at 2-3; Comments of Omnipoint Communications, Inc., at 3.

<sup>12</sup> Comments of MCI, at 7; Comments of GSA, at 6.

<sup>13</sup> Comments of Telecommunications Resellers Association, at 5.

<sup>14</sup> Comments of Nextel, at 3-4.

<sup>15</sup> Comments of SBC Communications, Inc., at 8.

## **II. Recovering the Costs of Long-Term Number Portability**

### **A. Competitive Neutrality Requires That Only Common or Shared Costs of Implementation Should Be Recoverable**

A competitively neutral standard requires that only the common or shared costs associate with number portability be recovered from all telecommunications carriers. The costs of upgrades to networks by individual carriers should be the sole responsibility of each individual telecommunications carrier. As MFS noted in its initial comments, just as every carrier must presently confront on its own the costs of compliance with the North American Numbering Plan, it is appropriate and efficient in this instance for each carriers to bear all of its own network costs associated with number portability. On the other hand, it would be inappropriate to give each carrier the opportunity to avoid the costs of its own behavior by allowing it to pass its costs on to competitors. Such a dynamic is the legacy of a regulated monopoly environment, which has no place in the newly competitive market prompted by the 1996 Act.

Allowing recovery of only common or shared industry costs does not create the same problematic incentives as carrier-specific costs, since no carrier will be able to undermine the creation and operation of shared facilities through poor technological choices or other inefficient behavior. Thus, common or shared costs will be generated in an efficient manner, and can rightfully be allocated among all telecommunications carriers for recovery.

In the *Further NPRM*, the Commission proposed that, among other things, a competitively neutral cost recovery mechanism “should not have a disparate effect on the

ability of competing service providers to earn a normal return.”<sup>16</sup> Permitting recovery of direct carrier-specific costs, however, serves only to subsidize inefficiency and penalize competing new entrants who may have the flexibility and aptitude to maintain lower costs in the process of complying with the implementation of number portability. The Commission must reject the reasoning of commenters who claim that competitive neutrality requires that direct carrier-specific costs should be recoverable. For example, BellSouth notes that it could incur significant costs in meeting the requirement of long-term number portability.<sup>17</sup> Two other commenters lament that forcing carriers to bear the direct carrier-specific costs of complying with number portability requirements would amount to an unconstitutional taking.<sup>18</sup> However, as MFS has previously commented, an example from the auto industry helps to demonstrate the inherent problems of such arguments. When air bags were mandated by federal law, all auto manufacturers were required to change their production lines to comply with the new law. Individual manufacturers could not recover the costs of adjusting their assembly line from competitors, and just because it had some effect on the resources and internal operations of manufacturers, this law could not be considered an unconstitutional taking. MFS offers this analogy to demonstrate that there is nothing innovative about making firms bear their own costs for complying with a federal law, and MFS submits that it is sound economic policy to require carriers to bear all carrier-specific costs incurred in complying with the number portability mandate.

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<sup>16</sup> *Further NPRM* at para. 210.

<sup>17</sup> Comments of BellSouth, at 6.

<sup>18</sup> Comments of Cincinnati Bell at 6; Comments of GTE at 6.

**B. The Commission Should Adopt Safeguards to Prevent Carriers From Passing Their Carrier-Specific Costs Along to Competitors**

If the costs of number portability are to be assessed on a competitively neutral basis, the Commission should restrict carriers from passing their number portability costs to competitors. MFS strongly supports the adoption of policies that will prevent carriers from passing along direct or indirect carrier-specific costs on to competitors through service charges between carriers. In order to enforce the 1996 Act's requirements of competitive neutrality, carriers must be directed to recover their number portability costs from services sold to consumers -- not from services sold to competitor providers. US West and ITCs suggest, on the other hand, that the Commission should require the recovery of costs through a surcharge to all end-users, including other carriers.<sup>19</sup> Such a proposal, however, violates the principles of competitive neutrality, because carriers should not be allowed to pass costs along to competitors by any means. As noted above, carriers will not internalize those costs associated with inefficiency or delay if they can simply transfer those costs to competitors. MFS agrees with the comments of WinStar in this regard: "Such a transaction would not only foil the competitively neutral goals of this proceeding, but also subvert the Commission's efforts in other proceedings to ensure that access charges and the like are cost-based in nature."<sup>20</sup> While a carrier should have the flexibility to pass its costs on to its customers or absorb those costs itself, the Commission should promulgate and enforce absolute prohibitions on the ability of carriers to use carrier-to-carrier payments for the

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<sup>19</sup> Comments of US West, at 14; Comments of ITCs, at 3.

<sup>20</sup> Comments of WinStar, at 8.

transfer of any carrier-specific costs associated with number portability.

By the same reasoning, MFS requests that the Commission prohibit price cap-regulated carriers from treating individual number portability costs as exogenous costs. If the Commission were to forbid carriers from recovering any carrier-specific costs, as MFS and others request, a policy permitting exogenous treatment of such costs would allow price cap incumbents to again pass these costs along to competitors, who will be unable to engage in the same practice. Similarly, MFS agrees with the analysis of MCI on exogenous treatment, concurring in the opinion that exogenous treatment of any carrier-specific costs "is not appropriate because [long-term number portability] costs are not being recovered through existing rates."<sup>21</sup> As MCI points out, exogenous treatment provides incumbents with an unfair advantage by allowing them to increase rates to recover these costs. MFS therefore urges the Commission to prevent carriers from treating any carrier-specific cost as exogenous for price cap regulation purposes.

### **III. States Choosing to Establish a Statewide Database Plan Must Follow the Federal Principles Adopted By the Commission in this Proceeding**

In the *Further NPRM*, the Commission proposed that any cost recovery mechanism it implements should be governed by two principles: "(1) a competitively neutral cost recovery mechanism should not give one service provider an appreciable, incremental cost advantage over another service provider, when competing for a specific subscriber; and 2) a competitively neutral cost recovery mechanism should not have a disparate effect on

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<sup>21</sup> Comments of MCI, at 12.

the ability of competing service providers to earn a normal return.”<sup>22</sup> In addition, the Commission proposed to require that states opting to develop their own statewide number portability database, rather than participating in a regional database, should abide by the principles and rules developed in this proceeding. *Id.* at para. 211. MFS joins the significant majority of commenters in agreeing that the two federal principles proposed by the Commission are useful in implementing long-term number portability,<sup>23</sup> and further urges the Commission to require all states choosing to implement their own databases to abide by the principles and rules developed in this docket.

While NYNEX and BellSouth claimed that the principles set forth by the Commission in the *Further NPRM* do not adequately address the danger of end users switching service providers because of artificial regulatory incentives,<sup>24</sup> MFS believes that the Commission's principles respond to these concerns properly. Indeed, MFS argues that alteration of these principles to address the switching of providers by end users may in fact preserve the status quo and insulate incumbents from competitors attempting to erode their customer base. MFS suggests that the principles as constituted do not promote the creation of artificial incentives by themselves, but rather they allow new entrants to compete for customers on the merits of their services, rates, and technological innovations.

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<sup>22</sup> *Further NPRM* at para. 210.

<sup>23</sup> Comments of Sprint, at 4; Comments of MCI, at 2; Comments of Ameritech, at 4; Comments of PCIA, at 4-5; Comments of Public Utilities Commission of Ohio, at 5; Comments of Illinois Commerce Commission, at 4; Comments of Association for Local Telecommunications Services, at 3; Joint Comments of Colorado Public Utilities Commission Staff and Colorado Office of Consumer Counsel, at 5-6; Comments of Florida Public Service Commission, at 2; Comments of Teleport Communications Group Inc., at 3; Comments of Time Warner Communications Holdings, Inc., at 6; Comments of People of the State of California and Public Utilities Commission of California, at 4.

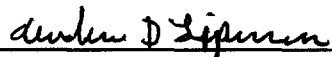
<sup>24</sup> Comments of NYNEX, at 10; Comments of BellSouth, at 4.

The Commission must also ensure that these principles -- and the cost allocation and recovery rules or guidelines promulgated according to these principles -- apply to states that choose to establish separate number portability databases. Without governing federal principles, new entrants may be forced to litigate number portability funding in each state, thereby deterring such competitors from undertaking the effort to enter a market in the first place. Moreover, if the Commission should adopt MFS' proposals to limit recovery to common or shared costs and prohibit recovery of carrier-specific costs, the common costs to be recovered in intrastate jurisdictions is likely to be *de minimis* and therefore state regulators may have little, if any, costs for which they must develop a cost recovery mechanism.

## Conclusion

For the foregoing reasons, MFS respectfully requests that the Commission adopt rules consistent with principles discussed herein.

Respectfully submitted,



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Dated: September 16, 1996



**CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

I hereby certify that on this 16th day of September 1996, copies of the  
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